

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Bog Turtle

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

It's a cold day, with snow falling, as a group of biologists hikes across a southern Appalachian bog. Biologist Sue Cameron has found a hole in the ground that looks promising. Standing in the mud, she rolls up her sleeve, gets down on her knees, and sticks her hand in the hole, hoping to find a bog turtle. She comes up empty handed – but this trip wasn't intended as a turtle search and the turtle happens to be one of the rarest in the United States.

The bog turtle is North America's smallest turtle, with a shell typically three to four inches long. There are two distinct populations – one in the northeast, and our own southern Appalachian population, found from southwest Virginia to north Georgia.

In 1997, the northern population was placed on the endangered species list. One of the biggest threats was, and continues to be, poaching for the illegal pet trade. Because individuals from the southern and northern populations are virtually indistinguishable, the southern population also received limited protection under the Endangered Species Act – among other things, making un-permitted possession of the turtle illegal, therefore poachers wouldn't be able to get off by claiming their turtles are from the unprotected southern population.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.